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SUBJECT: TOGO: NEW INFORMAL SNAPSHOT OF PUBLIC SENTIMENT

REF: LOME 437

¶1. SUMMARY. As post personnel have traveled around Togo prior to the March 4 presidential election, a picture has emerged not only of the views of those closely involved with the election, but also those who are not. Since there are no polls in Togo, these views are largely anecdotal: gathered in one-on-one conversations with Togolese and expatriates from all walks of life. They give a picture of a populace that is largely apathetic about the election and resigned that the incumbent will win; slightly hopeful for improved conditions in the country; eager for a non-violent election period; and ready for the election to be concluded so that they can get on with their lives. END SUMMARY.

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GENERAL MOOD  
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¶2. Many are apathetic about the election; some even say that they do not plan to vote. The preference is for a quick election, as there is little expectation of change and many are discouraged about the irresponsible behavior of politicians in general. They are resigned to the fact the incumbent will win and that the democratic process will take a back seat to President Faure Gnassingbe's desire to remain in power.

¶3. At the same time there is some respect for President Faure, although he is not popular. He is a familiar figure, and during his last five years in office economic conditions have improved and security conditions have relaxed. Few seem eager to test someone else's management style. Faure's slick campaign is ever-present with its professionally produced posters printed in France, catchy slogans, and targeted public appearances. The campaign elicits admiration, albeit grudging, even among opposition supporters. Some grumble that the money spent on this lavish campaign is a waste and could be better used to improve the general infrastructure such as building roads. At the same time, though, the opposition candidates are seen as disorganized, dishonest, and divided; focused on the minutiae of election process criticism and not on larger issues.

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SECURITY MATTERS  
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¶4. The excessive, brutal and arbitrary violence of the 2005 presidential election is seared into the country's collective memory, and no one wants it repeated. The general consensus is that President Faure, backed by military and security forces, is determined to maintain public order during the election. The Presidential Election Security Force (FOSEP), funded by the European Union and trained by the French, is well-prepared and has clear instructions to quash any gatherings that threaten this order. Faced with this, even

those who support the opposition are very cautious about running the personal risk of demonstrating. They remember that they were called to the streets in 2005 by opposition leaders who abandoned them and even left the country when the demonstrations turned violent. Many indicate they prefer to keep their heads down and be very careful for a few days before and after the election, particularly when election results are announced. They choose instead to focus on family and friends, improving their socio-economic status, and staying out of trouble with the security forces.

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SHOP NOW, BUT CAREFULLY  
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15. Families are stockpiling food and basic necessities in case stores close. Most have spent all their January salaries for these preparations and are hoping to be paid their February salaries before the election. Those without the money to stockpile are worried and are borrowing money from friends. Business people are anxious, though, as the purchase of non-essential items is delayed. Sales are down, the port of Lome is quiet after a Christmas period surge, and customers who can--both wholesale and retail--are avoiding Lome during the election period.

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STAY OR GO?  
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16. Although some Togolese are hopping the border to stay with extended family during the election period, most are simply staying put. Public schools plan to remain open but are rushing through their curriculums in case they must close. The expected surge in demand for U.S. and Schengen visas--the two most popular--did not occur. By contrast, though, many U.S. and European expatriates, primarily those who are not also citizens of Togo, are choosing the election time to vacation abroad. Since some of the 2005 violence targeted French and German property, businessmen whose companies are loathe to risk a repeat are sending their expatriates out of the country, other expatriates are leaving temporarily on their own. The American International School and the French lycee in Lome have adjusted vacation schedules to accommodate this exodus. However, the British school is remaining open.

17. COMMENT. The Togolese are resigned and apathetic largely because they do not believe that transparent and free elections are possible in Togo. They also remember the 2005 election violence and do not want a repeat. Most people think that the election will be generally peaceful; however, there is a slight possibility of violence. The government is willing to use force to stop open dissent before it gathers strength, and there may be dissent from certain radical organizations such as the opposition's Citizens' Movement for Change (MCA) and the ruling party's Group for the Support of the Party (GRAP) (reftel). Overall, though, the populace's lack of enthusiasm for change is feeding into the ruling party's probable victory. END COMMENT.  
Hawkins